

DISTINGUISHED MEMBER OF THE SPECIAL FORCES REGIMENT



**COLONEL
ROBERT HOWARD**

Inducted January 2010



Colonel Bob Howard was born on July 11, 1939 in Opelika, Alabama.

He entered military service on July 20, 1956 in Montgomery, Alabama, following in the footsteps of his father and four uncles who had served with airborne units in World War II. In December 1969 while serving as a master sergeant in 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), COL Howard received a direct appointment to 1LT.

Military assignments include duty with the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions; 2d Ranger Battalion; 3d, 5th, and 6th, Special Forces Groups; 5th Infantry Division; 7th Corps; XVIII Airborne Corps; the Eighth United States Army and Combined Forces Command. Service in Vietnam included serving with 1/327th Airborne Infantry, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division and Special Forces. He was the Post Commander of Kelly Barracks, Stuttgart, Germany, and Executive Officer of the 2d Ranger Battalion and the Mountain Ranger Camp.

COL Howard served a total of five tours in Vietnam. While with Special Forces, as a noncommissioned officer, his specialty was demolitions. He served the majority of his time with the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam - Studies and Observations Group (MACV-SOG). During his 58 months of combat, he was wounded 14 times. Between 1968 and 1969, he was nominated for three Medals of Honor. The first two nominations were downgraded to Distinguished Service Crosses. The first action occurred while COL Howard was a sergeant first class leading a covert SOG platoon-sized mission in southeastern Laos on November 16, 1967. When his team found themselves under heavy machine gun fire, COL Howard single-handedly eliminated the sniper pinning the team and then charged the machine gun position, killing all occupants. When a second machine gun opened up, he crawled forward and threw a hand grenade, disabling the gun only to have North Vietnamese troops begin to firing from it again. COL Howard, this time using a light antitank weapon, knocked it out once again. The team was then successfully extracted by helicopter. The second action occurred a year later on November 19, 1968 while COL Howard was leading a Forward Operating Base-2 Hatchet Platoon into Laos. After four days in the area, the force was ambushed by North Vietnamese troops, supported by a Soviet-built PT-76 tank. Braving intense fire, COL Howard crept forward and knocked out the PT-76 with an antitank rocket. After a mediac helicopter was shot down, COL Howard, already wounded, charged forward 300 yards through North Vietnamese fire to lead the two pilots and a wounded door gunner to safety. Although again wounded, this time by 14 pieces of shrapnel, he once again charged the enemy force, killing two and dragging back a third as a prisoner. After another aborted extraction attempt during the night, COL Howard moved forward and silenced the 37 mm anti-aircraft gun which had caused such havoc with the helicopters, allowing the extraction to be completed. On December 30, 1968, Howard was a member of a 40-man Bright Light rescue mission looking for PFC Robert Scherdin who was separated from another SOG reconnaissance team in northeastern Cambodia. He and Lieutenant (LT) Jerson, a team member on the mission, were wounded by a land mine. Upon reviving, COL Howard crawled to LT Jerson, administered first aid and dragged him off the hill. He then organized the remaining 20 of his platoon, administered first aid and directed fire for over 3-1/2 hours until they were finally extracted. As badly wounded as he was, COL Howard was the last man to board a helicopter.

On March 2, 1971, President Nixon presented him the Medal of Honor for this last action.

Later assignments included training instructor at the US Army Institute of Military Assistance (now USAJFKSWCS). COL Howard served as the Chief Instructor Phase One Special Forces Training, Special Forces School and later the Committee Chief, Officer and Enlisted Special Forces Qualification Course, Special Warfare School. As he did as Chief of the Ranger Training Area, Bob Howard was known to set an exemplary example for the candidates going through the course. COL Howard was a distinguished honor graduate of the Ranger Course, Pathfinder Course, and Parachute Rigger School. He received the Outstanding Infantryman's Trophy as Outstanding Infantry Officer of Class 1979-1980 at the Command and General Staff College. He graduated from the National War College, Class 1987-1988.

He has also received civilian recognition for service to his nation, receiving the Outstanding Young Man of America award in 1970; nominated as one of ten Outstanding Young Men in America in 1971 and 1972; inducted into the Military Hall of Fame, Hoover Institute, Stanford University in 1980; inducted into Military Hall of Fame, Veterans of Foreign Wars, State of Alabama in 1973; promoted to Colonel for Life, Alabama State Militia, State of Alabama, Governor George Wallace, 1976. He participated in two movies concerning airborne and special operations missions, both featuring John Wayne. He made a parachute jump on the filming of The Longest Day and as an airborne instructor in The Green Berets.

He was medically retired on September 30, 1992. After retirement, Colonel Bob Howard was employed by the Department of Veterans Affairs. He retired in January 2006 after 52 years of government service. He lived his last few years in San Antonio, Texas. Between 2007 and 2009, COL Howard served as the national president of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society. Prior to his death, he made numerous trips to Iraq to visit active duty soldiers.

His awards and decorations include: The Congressional Medal of Honor; Distinguished Service Cross (2); Silver Star; Bronze Star for Valor, 3d Oak Leaf Cluster; Purple Heart, 8th Award, 7th Oak Leaf Cluster; Defense Superior Service Medal; Legion of Merit, 3d Oak Leaf Cluster; Bronze Star for Meritorious Achievement; Air Medal for Valor, 2d Oak Leaf Cluster; Army Commendation Medal for Valor, 3d Oak Leaf Cluster; Air Medal for Aerial Flights; Army Meritorious Service Medal, 2d Oak Leaf Cluster; Army Commendation Medal for Meritorious Achievement, 2d Oak Leaf Cluster; Joint Service Commendation Medal; Joint Service Achievement Medal; Army Achievement Medal; Good Conduct Medal 4th Award; National Defense Service Medal; Armed Forces Reserve Medal; PNCO Ribbon W/2 device; Army Overseas Ribbon; Army Service Ribbon; Expeditionary Medal, 2d Oak Leaf Cluster; Vietnam Service Medal; Vietnam Campaign Medal with 60 device; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Gold Star; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Bronze Star; Vietnam Honor Medal 2d Award; Vietnamese Wound Medal; Vietnamese Civil Action Medal 2d Award; Army Presidential Unit Citation, 1st Oak Leaf Cluster; Navy Valorous Unit Citation; Army Meritorious Unit Citation; Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Palm, 1st Oak Leaf Cluster; Republic of Korea Samil Medal; Combat Infantryman's Badge; Aircraft Crewman's Badge; Master Parachute Badge; Pathfinder Badge; Air Assault Badge; Expert Infantryman's Badge; Vietnamese Ranger Badge; Army Ranger Tab; Special Forces Qualification Tab; Thai Master Parachute Wings; Vietnamese Master Parachute Badge; French Parachutist Badge; Korean Master Parachute Badge; and the Thai Balloonist Badge.